Blues Lesson for Gershwin Analysis name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In order to understand the themes and musical elements used in Gershwin’s *American in Paris*, it is important to have some basic knowledge of the blues idiom.

Review information from last class:

1. When and where did the blues originate?
2. The standard blues progression is \_\_\_\_\_ bars long and uses the \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ chords. Write out a blues progression in the key of E.

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What are the I, IV and V chords in E major? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Listen again to Robert Johnson’s version of *Crossroads*, and then listen to the Blues Brothers version. Briefly describe each style with key words only.

Robert Jonson’s version (1920s):

Blues Brothers version (1970s):

How are they similar? How are they different? (Key words only).

1. In the blues style, ‘blue notes’ occur when the 3rd, 5th or 7th are flatted (lowered a half step). In the staff below, write in an F major chord in bar 1, then write in the following notes in bars 2, 3 and 4. (Just write quarter notes in 4/4).

b3 1 b5 5 8 b7 5 b5 4 b3 3 1

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1. In *American in Paris*, where is the first blues theme located?
2. What type of feeling do you think that Gershwin is trying to create in the first blues theme? Make an inference, the answer is subject to interpretation.
3. Regarding the inspiration for *American in Paris,* David Kopplin notes that:

“It was a trip abroad that inspired Gershwin to work in earnest on a recent commission he had received from the New York Philharmonic. His idea for the new work solidified as he was shopping for Parisian taxi-horns to take back to the US: capture the tumult of Paris’ streets in music and create a concert work that didn’t center around the piano.” ([www.laphil.com](http://www.laphil.com))

1. Which theme is supposed to evoke to the sound of a taxi cab? Give the bar locations.
2. Gershwin’s brief program notes for *American in Paris* are as follows:

“The opening gay section is followed by a rich blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American… perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simpler than in the preceding pages. This blues rises to a climax, followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impression of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.” ([www.laphil.com](http://www.laphil.com))

According to Gershwin, which musical style is used to portray the American’s spasm of homesickness?